The Minister's Council on Local Development

PARTNERS IN STEWARDSHIP

The Second Report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs

92-04995/

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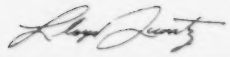
MINISTER'S COUNCIL ON LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

Statement of Submission



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Economist and Livestock Producer
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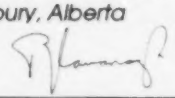

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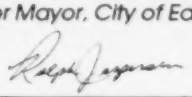
Former Mayor, City of Edmonton



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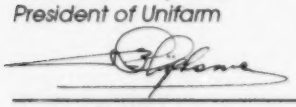
Farmer at Stony Plain
President of Unifarm



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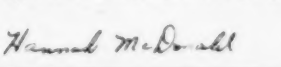
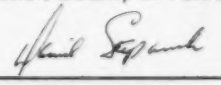
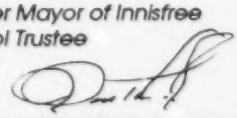


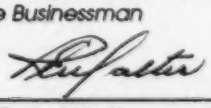
Hannah McDonald
Active partner of a farming operation
Councillor, County of Vulcan



Daniel Stepanik
Former Mayor of Innisfree
School Trustee



Donald Thorne
Former Mayor of Lacombe
Active Businessman



R.E. Bob Walter
Mayor, Town of High Level
Chairman, Mackenzie Regional
Planning Commission

The Honourable Raymond A. Speaker
Minister of Municipal Affairs for
THE GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA
Legislative Building
Edmonton, Alberta

November 30, 1990

Dear Mr. Speaker:

We are pleased to present jointly the Second Report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

This report bears the signature of all members of the Minister's Council on Local Development, which attests to unanimity in endorsement of its contents.

The Minister's Council
on Local Development

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Introduction

Goals of the Local Development Initiative

In 1989 the Premier of Alberta assigned the Minister of Municipal Affairs the task of developing the Local Development Initiative as the focal point for a partnership in revitalization between Alberta's communities, its people and the provincial government. The primary goals of the Local Development Initiative are three-fold:

- *To define the role that government should be playing in community revitalization;*
- *To highlight actions that government should be taking to best serve that role;*
- *To develop and deliver initiatives that will fulfil government's role and meet the needs of the people in Alberta's small communities.*

The Local Development Initiative was designed by government as a two-stage process. Since the beginning of the first stage in April, 1990, some twenty government departments have been conducting an internal review of policies, procedures and programs. At the same time, the Minister's Council on Local Development, appointed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, was given a mandate to gather the ideas and concerns about revitalization from Alberta's communities. The ministerial order empowering the Minister's Council on Local Development to act on behalf of the Minister of Municipal Affairs cites the following terms of reference:

Scope of the Minister's Council on Local Development

The council shall review the issues, concerns and opportunities on local development in light of trends in Alberta and other jurisdictions. Based on the findings from a province-wide public participation process, the council shall provide to the Minister of Municipal Affairs the ideas of Alberta's communities towards developing a coordinated provincial strategy for local development.

In conducting its review, the council may:

- *conduct public forums;*
- *invite public submissions;*
- *research relevant issues;*
- *consult with any person or group.*

The council shall report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs according to the following schedule:

- *draft report for public review — October 1, 1990;*
- *follow-up report — November 6, 1990 (since extended by the Minister of Municipal Affairs to November 30, 1990).*

Objectives for the Internal and External Review of the Local Development Initiative

The objectives set for both the internal and external review were four-fold:

- *To identify legislation and regulation that inhibits development in Alberta's small communities;*
- *To evaluate the effectiveness of government programs in supporting and promoting development of and in these communities;*
- *To assess the impact of the organization of government on the capability of communities to promote revitalization; and,*
- *To identify opportunities to introduce new resources, or more effectively use existing government resources to assist individual communities in promoting revitalization.*

Early in October, 1990, the Minister's Council on Local Development delivered its *First Report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs.* In that report the council released the findings of approximately two dozen public forums in which about 800 community leaders represented the views and ideas of over 250 communities and special interest groups. In many cases the ideas and opinions brought forward in these council-initiated forums were developed in locally-initiated forums conducted in the individual communities.

Objectives of the Feedback Process

For its follow-up report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the Minister's Council on Local Development was asked to return to the public to receive feedback on its first report. Specifically, the council was asked to accomplish three objectives from this process:

- *To make sure the findings of the first report accurately reflect the opinions and ideas of the participants;*
- *To ask the public to place priorities on the various findings of the council in its first report;*
- *To formulate a recommendation on how government should proceed to respond to the opinions and ideas of the participants.*

This follow-up report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs addresses these three objectives set for the Minister's Council on Local Development. Its contents represent public responses gathered by two methods. The first method was through four formal feedback forums conducted throughout the province. All participants in the first public forums received invitations to participate in these forums. As well, all Alberta communities were invited to participate and to extend an open invitation to their public.

The Council believes that this report accurately represents the comments provided on the first report, and the priorities established in the feedback process

"... the process of input is excellent and the first report... captures the concerns and opportunities in rural Alberta."

Letter from the Town of Lac La Biche

To provide the second method of feedback, all previous participants in the Local Development Initiative public forums, and all communities throughout Alberta were invited to conduct their own feedback forums and submit reports to the Minister's Council on Local Development. The invitation included suggested methods for conducting feedback forums, and a feedback guide that provided an easy method through which to report the findings of their forum.

The Minister's Council on Local Development believes that this follow-up report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs accurately represents the comments provided on the *First Report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs*, and also represents with equal accuracy the priorities established by feedback participants. The recommendations included in this report are conclusions drawn by the Minister's Council on Local Development, which have been developed to reflect the needs of Alberta's communities, and provide the guidance requested on how government should proceed to respond to the opinions and ideas of the communities.

First Report Feedback: An Overview

The overwhelming response in the feedback process was that the report did, indeed, present an accurate picture of the concerns and ideas of the participants

"The Minister's Council is to be complimented for their approach in the preparation of this report, as it is clear they did listen to the people!"

Mackenzie Regional Planning Commission

Where the First Report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs did receive criticism was in its apparent lack of representation of some sectors within the province

...no direct representation of the Native population was particularly noted in one feedback forum

The first objective of the feedback process was to determine whether the Minister's Council on Local Development's *First Report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs* accurately reflected the ideas and opinions expressed in the public forums. The overwhelming response in the feedback forums, as well as in individual and group feedback submissions, was that the report did, indeed, present an accurate picture of the concerns and ideas of the participants. In no feedback forums or submissions were there any indications of errors or omissions. In fact, many feedback participants remarked on how well the report reflected the discussions held in the particular forum they personally attended. The fact that this report, a very brief summary of many discussions held in many public forums, was seen to accurately represent the discussions in the individual forums brings the Minister's Council on Local Development to two conclusions. First is the conclusion that the *First Report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs* does, indeed, reflect the opinions of the public forum participants. The second conclusion is that there is a great deal of strength and significance in the findings due to the striking similarities in input received in each of the forums.

Limitations of the First Report

Where the *First Report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs* did receive criticism, however, was in its apparent lack of representation of some sectors within the province. Lack of direct representation of the Native population of the province was particularly noted in one feedback forum in which a Native organization presented a formal feedback submission. While this submission did indicate concurrence with most of the findings in the first report, the Minister's Council on Local Development still acknowledges a lack of reference to specific Native issues in its first report. The council attributes that, not to oversight, but to the fact that there was little representation of that sector in the first public forums. The task assigned to the Minister's Council was to report findings as expressed by forum participants. Notwithstanding this lack of representation, ***the Minister's Council on Local Development urges the provincial government, in conjunction with the federal government, to consider the need for further investigation into Native issues during the implementation stage of the Local Development Initiative.***

First Report Feedback: An Overview

It was also noted that there was an apparent lack of large urban center representation

"...many of the problems identified by smaller communities are shared by the City of Calgary."

Letter from the City of Calgary

...some noted comments that the report was lacking in solutions from the agricultural sector

"Alternatives (for the agriculture industry) have to be looked at now!"

Submission from the Town of High River

The Minister's Council recommends accelerated action in dealing with the issues confronting the agricultural industry as part of the implementation stage of the Local Development Initiative.

It was also noted in yet another feedback forum that there was an apparent lack of large urban center representation in the *First Report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs*. It was not the intent of the Minister's Council to distinguish between "urban" and "rural" sectors within the province. All communities, no matter what their size or municipal classification, are stakeholders in the future of the province, and were invited to participate in the public forums held by the council. The council certainly recognizes that a number of the issues raised in the public forums are not applicable to larger communities that contain a more self-sufficient structure. But it also concludes that the more significant issues arising from the work of the Minister's Council do affect larger communities, and are just as significant to those communities as they are to the smaller communities throughout Alberta. Feedback responses received from urban sectors support that position.

Finally, of equally major significance are some noted comments that the *First Report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs* was lacking in solutions from the agricultural sector. The Minister's Council believes that to be a two-sided issue. On the one hand, there was very high and vocal representation from communities that are surrounded and have depended on a strong agricultural base. Because of the focus of discussion in forums that included these communities, it is apparent that participants were, for the most part, more concerned with discussing *alternatives* or *supplements* to agricultural dependency, as opposed to discussing the state of the existing agricultural industry. Water management and value-added agricultural processing were among the most significant discussion topics related directly to the agricultural sector. This, the council believes, reflects a realization of the changing role and dynamics of agriculture throughout Alberta, Canada, North America, and beyond, and a desire to focus on overall community revitalization, not solely on agricultural revitalization.

On the other hand, the Minister's Council on Local Development is aware of the limitations of the *First Report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs* in dealing with the issues of today's agricultural industry. The council is also aware from its investigations that this is a high priority in the eyes of the provincial government. There continues to be a major role for agriculture in the future of Alberta. While participants in the Local Development Initiative public forum process focused more on alternatives and supplements to that industry, there is still a strong need to deal directly with agriculture as a base industry, as well as setting the groundwork for revitalization add-ons. ***The Minister's Council recommends accelerated action in dealing with the issues confronting the agricultural industry as part of the implementation stage of the Local Development Initiative.***

Community Goals Revisited

The government has provided Alberta's communities with a solid foundation in infrastructure and quality-of-life services; and without this solid foundation, goals like those expressed by Alberta's communities would not likely be achievable for generations.

While expressing them in many different ways, participants in the initial public forum process identified five goals by which Alberta's communities will be guided in paving the way for future revitalization. In the view of the Minister's Council on Local Development, these goals not only reflect goals for the future, but also serve as tributes to past accomplishments. The government has provided Alberta's communities with a solid foundation in infrastructure and quality-of-life services; and without this solid foundation, goals like those expressed by Alberta's communities would not likely be achievable for generations. While there is certainly more work to be done to make them a complete reality, government should be commended for putting Alberta's communities in a position to make these goals relatively short-term aspirations.

Government should be commended for putting Alberta's communities in a position to make these goals relatively short-term aspirations

For the most part, these are repeated from the *First Report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs* to emphasize the important link between what Alberta's communities strive to achieve, and what problems they encounter most in reaching their desires. Findings from the feedback process indicate that these goals do, indeed, represent the general goals of Alberta's communities. However, at the suggestion of feedback participants, the descriptive comments following the first goal have been revised.

1. ***To preserve the lifestyle provided in a small community environment***

   To members of small communities, theirs is the best lifestyle possible. Development for the sake of preserving that way of life would be the most welcome.

2. ***To provide a level of quality-of-life amenities that meets the needs of the people***

   Community residents recognize that a small population base does not provide resources sufficient to support amenities at a level available in larger centers. However, acceptable levels of services must be maintained to assure preservation of their lifestyle, and continuous but controlled growth.

3. ***To foster continuous, yet controlled growth***

   Alberta communities welcome the new ideas and skills that come with residents who migrate from other areas of the province. But overall, they believe most of their economic growth will come from within the community.

Findings from the feedback process indicate that these goals do, indeed, represent the general goals of Alberta's communities

4. ***To build a stable, long-term financial future***
   Albertans in small communities would like to see sufficient development to ensure a financial base adequate to support the other goals that will guide them in revitalization.

5. ***To preserve and care for the environment***
   Local communities believe they know best how to tend to the needs of their environment, because they have a great deal at stake if it is threatened or abused.

The Roles of Government: Priority Problems

The second objective of the feedback stage was to ask Alberta's communities which of the problems identified in the first report are the most important

In the *First Report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs*, the Minister's Council presented many *problems* and *opportunities* identified by forum participants under five statements — statements that reflected the role government should be playing in the revitalization process. These were:

- *Being accessible and responsive*
- *Providing quality of life services*
- *Supporting, not dictating community activities*
- *Stimulating economic growth*
- *Showing leadership by example*

The second objective of the feedback stage of the Local Development Initiative was to ask Alberta's communities which of the problems identified in *The First Report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs* are the most important. Narrowing down the list of concerns would assist the Minister's Council in setting recommendation priorities, and government in setting priorities in the implementation stage.

The following represent the priorities set by the participants in the feedback forums, and in the many additional submissions received. The council's goal was to identify the most significant issues in the eyes of Albertans. Three under each role identified in the first report was the desired result. In some cases, however, the number could not be reduced to three and still reflect the priorities expressed by the majority of participants in the feedback process.

In the feedback forums, once priority problems were identified, participants were asked to determine what opportunities for action should be considered the top priorities for consideration by the government. Because many opportunities address more than one specific issue, and because of the structure of this report, the opportunities identified as most important in the feedback process have not been directly linked in this section to specific priority problems. These priority opportunities appear in the section entitled *A New Partnership: Putting it to the Test.*

The findings from the feedback process indicate that the following are the priority problems in the opinion of the people of Alberta's communities.

The Roles of Government: Priority Problems

The findings from the feedback process indicate that these are the priority problems in the opinion of the people of Alberta's communities

Being accessible and responsive

- *Lack of coordination between government departments*
- *Government processes are not "user-friendly"*
- *Lack of access to department decision-makers*
- *Lack of knowledge and information about government departments, their responsibilities and programs*

Providing quality of life services

- *Loss of youth to larger centers*
- *Difficult to attract and retain professional people*
- *Access to adequate health services*
- *Absence of post-secondary education opportunities*

Supporting, not dictating community activity

- *Lack of flexibility in programs and grant structure*
- *Local initiatives driven and dictated by short-term grants and program commitments*
- *Government too involved in setting priorities on issues of a local nature*

Stimulating economic growth

- *Lack of access to investment funding*
- *Lack of education in entrepreneurial skills*
- *Little information about emerging business opportunities and economic initiatives*
- *Lack of orientation and incentive toward cooperative planning and development*

Showing leadership by example

- *Little input is solicited from the communities in the creation of programs*
- *Excessive controls on local governments*

Principles to Stimulate Local Development Revisited

In virtually all cases, these principles remain sound summary statements reflecting the priority concerns of Alberta's small communities

The Minister's Council on Local Development developed, from the concerns and ideas expressed by the people of Alberta's urban and rural communities, ten principles to stimulate local development. These principles were first presented in the council's *First Report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs*. While the feedback process was primarily concerned with testing whether the *problems* and *opportunities* reported in that first report accurately represented the issues expressed in the initial public forums, there was another testing process that took place at the same time: testing the validity of *the principles to stimulate local development* that were adopted by the Minister's Council on Local Development to represent the overall concerns and desires of Alberta's community representatives.

These principles really passed two tests. The first test was passed when participants in the feedback forums and write-in submissions acknowledged the accuracy of the council's reporting of the problems and opportunities. The second test was to see if these ten principles reflected the problem and opportunity priorities that participants were asked to establish in feedback sessions and responses.

In virtually all cases, these principles remain sound summary statements reflecting the priority concerns of Alberta's small communities.

I. Local initiatives should determine responses and actions of departments so that government can effectively meet the expectations of the people.

II. Local government should be given more responsibility and authority for local initiatives.

III. The provincial government should develop and communicate a long-term plan/direction which coordinates and streamlines departments to achieve their stated goals for local development initiatives.

IV. Government should ensure communities/regions have equal opportunity to attract development projects which have provincial support.

V. Government needs to facilitate and promote investment by local citizens in development projects.

Principles to Stimulate Local Development Revisited

"It is now our turn to show our enthusiasm and get involved, for the sake of our future!"

Submission from the Town of Drayton Valley

VI. Funding mechanisms should respond to the reasonable needs of the communities, and reflect the varying local costs of meeting those needs.

VII. Government should encourage and support regional and inter-municipal cooperation in local development initiatives.

VIII. Authority to administer policy and programs should be delegated to the lowest levels possible within government departments to ensure accessibility to decision-makers at the community level.

IX. Government must improve its responsiveness to local communities through improved communication at all levels.

X. Government should encourage and promote a positive image of rural and small town Alberta.

Alberta's Communities: Their Philosophy for the Future

... the Minister's Council on Local Development uncovered clear indications of the philosophy of Alberta's community residents

The Minister's Council on Local Development believes that confirmation of the findings of the *First Report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs*, and the setting of priorities on issues arising from that report, have been a major accomplishment in establishing a sound partnership for revitalization between government, Alberta's communities and its people. But, in working to formulate its conclusions for this follow-up report, the Minister's Council on Local Development uncovered clear indications of the philosophy of Alberta's community residents. That philosophy is quite simple.

Albertans openly accept responsibility for the future revitalization of their communities

Albertans openly accept responsibility for the future revitalization of their communities. "We need to help ourselves" is a theme that rang out in many different ways throughout the course of both the public forums and the feedback sessions and submissions. Albertans believe that, given the wherewithal, they can take every possible stride toward the goals they have established for their community. They see a great deal of advantage and opportunity coming out of enhanced cooperation between individual communities, and between the communities and government.

"Help us to help ourselves... that's all we ask."

Medicine Hat Forum Participant

Albertans believe that many of the tools required to meet the challenges of achieving their goals are visible and available, but not within their easy reach

Albertans also believe, though, that ***many of the tools required to meet the challenges of achieving their goals are visible and available, but not within their easy reach***. An equally resounding theme of "give us the tools and we will do the job" came in one form or another from each and every forum conducted by the council. There is no misconception among Alberta's communities about the fact that the provincial government has a vital role to play in their future. But they also believe that there are times when government should lead, times when it should follow, and times when it should get out of the way.

Reciprocal trust, in the eyes of Alberta's communities, is the only way all of Alberta can meet the challenge of shifting trends

The people of Alberta recognize that they have entrusted a great deal of responsibility to the elected officials that comprise their government, and have reinforced their trust for many years. They have also recognized, as has their government, that social and economic trends are shifting, and that adjusting to those shifts is not a challenge to government alone. It is a challenge that must also be met head-to-head by the people who are responsible for the future of Alberta's communities, and it is time to return some of that trust to them, so they may *undertake their responsibility* and respond to the changing needs in the best way they see fit. ***Reciprocal trust, in the eyes of Alberta's communities, is the only way all of Alberta can meet the challenge of these shifting trends.***

Alberta's Communities: Their Philosophy for the Future

Albertans are looking to their government to put more emphasis on the "service" in "public service" and respond to their needs, not in a paternal sense, but in a partnership sense

"It is impossible to imagine a negative side to a partnership..."

Submission from the Town of Grand Cache

"The basis of many of the conflicts identified today has been around for a long time."

Mayerthorpe Forum Participant

"The government's role should be to act as a resource only to empower the people to take charge of their own future."

Fort MacLeod Forum Participant

Albertans are looking to their government to put more emphasis on the "service" in "public service" and respond to their needs, not in a paternal sense, but in a partnership sense. They see a partnership as a relationship where responsibility, accountability and authority are assigned to each partner according to their individual strengths. The strength in Alberta's communities, they believe, is in knowing what is best for their own community. Government's strength is its mechanism to contribute to the partnership what the communities cannot provide efficiently and effectively through their own devices.

Government's Role & Structure: A Foundation for Local Development

... it was quite apparent, and strongly reinforced in the feedback sessions, that most of the significant problems were universal

"...we are all in the same boat, with the same, or similar problems..."

Beaverlodge Forum Participant

...there were many opportunity priorities established in the feedback process, but no single recommendation would reflect the ideas of all, or even most Albertans

...the Minister's Council on Local Development believes its mandate is best served through a single recommendation that encompasses virtually every issue that has been raised

The Minister's Council on Local Development has been asked to provide recommendations on how government can best respond to the issues and concerns expressed by Alberta's communities. When discussing problems and opportunities with Albertans in the first series of public forums, it was quite apparent, and strongly reinforced in the feedback sessions, that most of the significant problems were universal, and virtually all of those problems were related to what they believe government should be doing, versus what they perceive government to be doing.

While those related problems were echoed throughout the province, the opportunities were not always as universally expressed. Certainly there were many opportunity priorities established in the feedback stage forums and submissions, but often they were opportunities that were expressed conceptually, rather than explicitly. As an example, the concept of a *one-window* approach to government was a priority opportunity for improvement in the partnership between government and Alberta's communities. But, there were many ideas on how that one-window approach might work. No single recommendation would reflect the ideas of all, or even most Albertans.

To reflect the views of Alberta's communities in its recommendations, and to assist government in its goal of building a strong revitalization partnership, the Minister's Council on Local Development believes its mandate is best served through a single recommendation that encompasses virtually every issue that has been raised and confirmed in the two stages of public forums and submissions. That recommendation is simply this:

> ***Government should take all practical actions necessary and available to ensure that the role and structure of government and its programs are aligned to the philosophy and expectations of the people in Alberta's communities.***

It is not the intention of the Minister's Council on Local Development to conclude months of holding public forums and reviewing submissions in one general statement. But, neither does it intend to assume that, in a matter of a few short months, it can bring to the table a complete package of solutions to all problems, where all options have been researched for practicality and effectiveness.

What the Minister's Council on Local Development intends to do in the balance of this report is two-fold. First, based on the philosophy Alberta's

First... the council will present the perspective of the communities related to role and structure

Second, the council will offer some criteria that Alberta's communities may use to assess how government is carrying out its role in community revitalization

communities have expressed about their role and government's role in revitalization, and also based on the problems expressed in the first public forums and placed in high priority in the feedback stage, the council will present the perspective of the communities related to role and structure.

Second, the council will offer some criteria that Alberta's communities may use to assess how government is carrying out its role in community revitalization. These criteria come from the people of Alberta's communities, and were originally presented in the *First Report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs* in the form of *opportunity* statements. Since that time, in various feedback forums and submissions, participants have selected priority opportunities for government's consideration. These priorities will be reflected in the section entitled *A New Partnership: Putting it to the Test.*

The Role of Government: A Communities View

In the view of Alberta's communities, the role of government is simply stated

...government employees at the community service level are mostly programmed to say "no," rather than work to resolve issues or accommodate needs

"A successful LDI program will demand the expertise of dedicated and committed provincial civil servants."

Submission from the City of St. Albert

The Minister's Council concludes that government employees must be guided by government's leaders in fulfilling a more productive role than "administering according to policy"

Reciprocal trust means that government trusts the people to do the best thing for their communities: The people trust the government to do the best thing for the province

In the view of Alberta's communities, the role of government, especially when it comes to revitalization and future development, is simply stated:

> ***Government should provide service to Alberta's communities and their people in areas that they cannot efficiently and effectively provide for themselves.***

The perception within Alberta's communities reflected in the council forums was often related to the "attitude" of government (as represented through the people with which they interact) in handling the needs and requests of community representatives. It appears, in their eyes, that government employees at the community service level are mostly programmed to say "no," rather than work to resolve issues or accommodate needs. "Attitude," the council found in further investigation, was really the wrong term to apply to the problem. In most situations government employees were considered to be sympathetic and interested in helping. The concerns came more typically from situations were government employees were apparently obliged to respond with "I cannot help you unless procedures are properly followed and you qualify under the precise guidelines established."

The Minister's Council concludes that government employees, especially those who interact with communities on a regular basis, must be guided by government's leaders in fulfilling a more productive role than "administering according to policy." And with that guidance toward a "service the needs" ethic must come the tools with which to fulfil that role: the authority and knowledge to review the needs of the community and respond within only the most necessary program guidelines. The most dedicated and responsive government employees are rendered helpless under inflexible program guidelines and no authority to convey and respond with a service-oriented ethic. And communities are rendered helpless when their heavily-burdened volunteers are confronted with the confusing forms, endless procedures, and incomprehensible approval channels that comprise the ever-present phenomenon called "red tape."

Reciprocal trust means that government trusts the people to do the best thing for their communities: The people trust the government to do the best thing for the province. In that type of partnership, assisting the people to provide the best thing for their communities should be the primary role: "No" should be the answer of last resort.

The Role of Government: A Communities View

In a partnership, assisting the people to provide the best thing for their communities should be the primary role: "No" should be the answer of last resort

...what makes this a particularly challenging mandate is the fact that there are different requirement levels in different communities

... beyond funding, Alberta's communities look to the provincial government as a source for many services which they cannot efficiently and effectively provide on their own

"... the key to progress lies in local decision-making, matched with local accountability and supported by creative partnerships between communities, between communities and government, and between public and private sectors."

Letter, West Central Region Tourism Initiative Project

Over and above a more dramatic government shift to a service-oriented ethic, what makes this a particularly challenging mandate is the fact that there are different requirement levels in different communities. While one community, for example, might have at its disposal a number of experienced resources on a particular development issue, another community may have absolutely no resources at all. Government must be sensitive to the individual differences of the communities throughout Alberta, and the only apparent method of developing that sensitivity and responding to individual differences is for government as a whole to "get closer to the communities."

Generally speaking, beyond funding, Alberta's communities look to the provincial government as a source for many services which they cannot efficiently and effectively provide on their own. They need government to provide assistance with things like:

- *Opportunities to become involved in planning government projects that may affect their community*
- *Opportunities to promote their community nationally and internationally for economic development projects*
- *Opportunities to promote migration of professionals to their communities*
- *Counsel and expertise in areas where economic development opportunities are present*
- *Local opportunities to encourage their youth to stay in the community*
- *Access to information to assist in community planning and development*
- *Providing the catalyst for cooperation between communities in development projects*
- *Knowing and understanding where government is headed and how it will affect them*
- *Knowing how to best utilize government and the programs that are available*
- *Methods of generating investment capital within their communities*

The Structure of Government: A Communities View

A number of good ideas and opportunities may be lost each and every day because they are no longer available by the time someone finds the time to go back and "buck the system"

...this persistent need to make government more user-friendly, responsive and client-oriented is a high priority

Alberta's communities would like to see the government come closer to the people:
"What we require... is not the establishment of government departments in our town, but the help and expertise of government advising us..."

Daysland Forum Participant

Albertans appreciate the concept of government regionalization, but what they would appreciate most is coordinated regional representation

There are many concerns out in Alberta's communities about how government works with the people: how it responds to requests for information; how it delivers program details; how it structures grants, regulations and legislation.

Alberta's communities depend upon volunteers to assist in their development, and their time is becoming increasingly valuable. They become easily frustrated by what they perceive to be "the runaround," "red tape," and "passing the buck." Negotiations for new business ventures may not be able to get past the stage of discovering that there are several departments of government that have some influence or program requirements to consider in the process. Often, these types of situations lead to a desperation call to the MLA, who must try to follow through using equally limited time and personnel resources. A number of good ideas and opportunities may be lost each and every day because they are no longer available by the time someone finds the time to go back and "buck the system."

The Minister's Council on Local Development submits that this persistent need to make government more user-friendly, responsive and client-oriented is a high priority — and goes hand-in-hand, but considerably beyond government developing and acting with the right purpose. The structure of government and how it relates with the communities plays a major role in meeting the expectations of Alberta's communities.

Alberta's communities would like to see government come "closer to the people." Although decentralization has not been ruled out by participants in the forums, they also realize that government has already decentralized a number of operations into regional centres. But, rather than easing the interaction between communities and its government, the style of decentralization has led many communities to wonder if there really is any true unity and coordination to Alberta's government. Each department defines its own region and seems to go off in its own programming direction. When (and it's perceived to be often) a project crosses the path from one department responsibility to another, it's off to another regional office in another regional territory defined by another government department to start another new process under a new set of rules and regulations.

Albertans appreciate the concept of government regionalization, but what they would appreciate most is coordinated regional representation. It is not so much the number of government employees located throughout the province, nor is it the need for more decentralized sites. ***Rather, it is a desire to be able to "touch" government close to home and have all of government that is involved feel the touch and respond.***

The Structure of Government: A Communities View

... a desire to be able to "touch" government close to home and have all of government that is involved feel the touch and respond

"The current situation with numerous government departments serving rural Alberta, each with a different area, is unacceptable and should be modified to better meet the needs of the residents of Alberta."

Submission from an Independent Citizen

Cooperative, coordinated government representation at the community level must have a mirror image of cooperation and coordination at levels where policy decisions are made and programs are conceived and developed

Government must be prepared to apply flexibility to the design of programs by focusing on intent; and must place that flexibility in the hands of the people who service the people of Alberta

To the Minister's Council on Local Development, this desire calls for government to revamp its regionalized network to provide coordinated access for Alberta's communities. This implies a number of things. First, it implies more coordinated service boundaries to respond to geographic convenience, rather than departmental program idiosyncrasies. It implies coordinated programming, where government participates in a team approach to servicing project requirements (and also suggests that government efficiency would best be served by reducing as much as possible the overlaps in department responsibilities). And it also implies that there be a focal point of contact that can become familiar with the operations of government *and* the needs of the individual communities.

Finally, this bringing together of government departments into a local, coordinated service center also implies that government departments are equally coordinated at more senior "head office" levels. ***Cooperative, coordinated government representation at the community level must have a mirror image of cooperation and coordination at levels where policy decisions are made and programs are conceived and developed.***

But equally important to the successful delivery of a coordinated service center is the local representatives' abilities to serve the purpose of government as seen by Alberta's communities. To make "no" the answer of last resort, government employees who deal with the everyday needs of Alberta's communities must be able to say "yes." ***Government must be prepared to apply flexibility to the design of programs by focusing on intent; and must place that flexibility in the hands of the people who service the people of Alberta.***

A New Partnership: Putting it to the Test

... these priority opportunities will become natural actions from a government that orients itself to a redefined service ethic and structure

...government can expect Albertans in communities throughout the province will use these priority opportunities as criteria for measuring the success of the new partnership

"In short, support us, but let us go for it in our own way."

Hanna Forum Participant

Administer programs locally by the intent, not by the letter of the law

Create a single, local focal point of access to program information and decisions

Through the Minister's Council on Local Development, the Government of Alberta has asked the people of Alberta's communities how they can best serve in the partnership for revitalization. From the problems and opportunities revealed in the initial forums, and confirmed and prioritized in the feedback sessions, the council presented in its first report a set of principles for government to consider in its response.

Now, in this report, the Minister's Council on Local Development has proposed a directional framework for government : a role statement, or purpose, and a structural concept around which to carry out that role.

This report is not complete, however, until it deals with the opportunities for action cited in the *First Report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs*. The council believes that the priority opportunities listed below will become natural actions from a government that orients itself to a redefined service ethic and structure. The Minister's Council also believes that government can expect Albertans in communities throughout the province will use these priority opportunities as criteria for measuring the success of the new partnership.

These priority options have been grouped into four categories, strictly for convenience in future reference. In some cases, opportunities are cited as specific actions. In other instances, two or more options for action may be provided. And, in yet other cases, only expectations are cited, and the means to those ends are left to government to develop and manage.

Access, Authority, Coordination and Cooperation

Albertans would like to see government's programs administered by intent, not by the letter of inflexible law. Government representatives at the local level must be provided with the flexibility to make judgements according to intent of the programs, and communities should be given the flexibility to benefit the most from the programs.

Albertans are looking for a single focal point where they can present their needs to government and be provided with answers and decisions at the local level. They seek a "one window" approach to government, which may require a formal teamwork structure that brings all government departments together.

Communities would like to see the myriad of single-focus, single-purpose programs consolidated into groups of "umbrella" programs

Combine and simplify programs designed with flexibility in mind

Provide easier access to department and program information

Simplify forms and procedures

Support and stimulate intermunicipal cooperation

Let communities participate in project planning

Provide local flexibility in application of regulations

Promote cooperation between post-secondary institutions in providing advanced education opportunities

Provide opportunity for training in entrepreneurial and community development skills

that provide more flexibility and opportunity to participate. If there is an internal need for cross-over between departments on similar programs, or duplication of programs serving similar purposes, such cross-over or duplication should be virtually invisible and unobtrusive to the user.

Albertans want to know what is available in government programming and how to go about benefiting from programs. They do not feel they should have to search out the information — it should be offered to them.

Albertans want forms that are easy to fill out (with only the information and auditing that is really necessary to meet the intent), and procedures that are easy to understand and follow. An option may be to involve end users in the design of forms and procedures. But, in the end good communications should prevail over legalese.

Albertans are looking to government to stimulate cooperation and coordination between communities in the revitalization process. Incentives for cooperative projects is a viable option.

Communities want to participate in the planning of government projects that will have a significant impact on their communities.

Communities are looking for inspection authorities that have the ability to waive regulations that are unnecessarily restrictive in certain community environments.

Human Resource Development

Albertans want post-secondary education institutions to work together in providing additional post-secondary education opportunities in smaller communities. There is a need for a coordinated certification exchange between advanced education institutions in Alberta.

Alberta's community leaders want ongoing training in entrepreneurial and community development skills. They would also like to see professional training in these skills for those in the position to advise communities on community and economic development. A certification program in Alberta, or western Canada, would address this need.

Provide assistance in attracting professionals to communities

Extend funding commitments to allow longer-term planning in communities

Design and back a community development bond program

Adjust transfer funding to allow more community flexibility in providing for the needs of the people

Share revenue from major projects with communities providing the infrastructure

Assist the agriculture industry with diversification opportunities

Develop and communicate long-term government plans with communities

Communities are looking for assistance in attracting professionals. Any program should be designed to be delivered by the communities *with the support of the provincial government.*

Finances

Albertans want funding commitments that encourage coordinated, accountable fiscal budgeting and long-term planning. Programs that don't run long enough, or are drastically revised, do not permit communities to benefit from future planning. Don't change programs for the sake of change.

Communities urgently want a *community development bond* program, backed by the provincial government, to assist them and their local businesses in raising funds through investment by local citizens.

Alberta's communities are looking for transfer funding that is even less restrictive and more conducive to meeting the specific needs of individual communities. Government's support of the principle of *reciprocal trust* should especially be demonstrated in the grant structure. Simplify, consolidate and remove unnecessary conditions from grants. This need applies specifically to municipal grants, as well as to payments to individuals, organizations and businesses.

Communities providing infrastructure for projects that are major revenue generators for the provincial government expect sufficient revenue-sharing from that project to provide maintenance and future development of that infrastructure.

Information

Albertans want information from government that will assist them in diversification opportunities and enhancing the agricultural industry through value-added processing.

Communities need to know the long-term plans of government to ensure that both levels of government are moving in the same direction. A government that expresses planning ideas that venture beyond an election term would not be considered presumptuous, but insightful of the need to plot a course beyond the short term.

Bring access to information on business, industry and economic opportunities to the local level

Improve community access to information related to local development

Provide modern, responsive communications systems

Communities need information on business and industry trends, innovations and emerging economic opportunities that may provide assistance in the development of local initiatives. This information should be made available through present technology for direct access by communities and individuals at the local or regional level.

Communities require access to expertise and data on areas related to local development. It is important that this expertise be available on an on-call basis, and preferably from a more localized source that may not necessarily need to be an office of government.

Albertans seek a communications system that addresses the need for responsive emergency services, and accommodates the use of modern communications technology.

Partners in Stewardship

"My government must be a steward for Albertans. They have placed their trust and faith in this assembly... and this assembly must be everything a steward should be..."

"As a steward, my government does not dictate the common will, but rather, must listen to the voices of Albertans and express their will through the instruments of government that Albertans entrust to this assembly..."

"As a steward for the people of Alberta... my government must be flexible and focused... diversified and united..."

Excerpts from the Speech from the Throne delivered at the opening of the Second Session of the 22nd Legislature of the Province of Alberta on Tuesday, March 8, 1990

The Minister's Council on Local Development believes that, in its many months of hearing and compiling the ideas and opinions of Albertans throughout the province, there is strong support for their government's role as a steward for the province. They seek easy access to, and service from their steward, and have asked in the many public forums and submissions that government *listen to their voice and express their will through the instruments of government.* They call for a government that is *flexible* in its delivery and *focused* in its direction. They have experienced and recognize the benefits of *diversification*, but would also like to see their government more *united* in the way it presents itself to the people.

But most of all, Albertans are looking to their government to be a steward to the province, while the communities retain accountability and regain the ability to serve the needs and best interests of their people. The people of Alberta's communities must provide the leadership, and accept the accountability and responsibility that comes with the role they seek in the revitalization partnership. But, just as Alberta's communities must be driven by their leaders in this partnership, so, too, must the provincial government be driven by its leaders to provide Alberta's communities with tools, the authority, and the support they require to meet their commitment to the partnership.

On behalf of the people it was asked to consult, the Minister's Council on Local Development presents this challenge, through the Minister of Municipal Affairs, to the Premier, his cabinet, and all elected members of government.

As a final recommendation, the Minister's Council on Local Development encourages government to consider repeating, at the appropriate time, a public process similar to that used by this council. This follow-up process will assist government in assessing progress in the achievement of a working partnership in revitalization.

Appendix

Additional Submissions from the Feedback Process

City of St. Albert
Parkland Regional Library
Chinook Arch Library Project
Town of Grand Cache
Alberta Research Council
Hanna Conference Evaluation on Priorities
Town of Bow Island
Town of Tofield
Alberta Jersey Cattle Club
Alberta Association of Registered Nurses
Innisfree Home & School Council
Calgary Regional Planning Commission
Alliance & District Chamber of Commerce
Town of High River
Town of Peace river
Town of Barrhead
Frank Simon
Town of Lac La Biche
Town of Carstairs
Town of Mayerthorpe
Bruderheim
Oldman Regional Planning Commission
City of Red Deer
Alberta Agri Ethonal Co. Ltd.
Brian Austrom
City of Calgary
West Central Region Tourist Initiative Project
Town of Lacombe
Town of Olds
City of Edmonton
Municipal District of Spirit River

Feedback Forums

Camrose **October 18, 1990**

71 Participants

No Briefs Submitted

Fairview **October 29, 1990**

76 Participants

Briefs Submitted From:

- Little Red River Cree Tribe
- Town of Peace River
- Mackenzie Regional Planning Commission
- Council for the Town of High Level
- New Town of Rainbow Lake

Smoky Lake **November 1, 1990**

87 Participants

Briefs Submitted From:

- Town of Bonnyville
- County of Barrhead

Coaldale **November 2, 1990**

52 Participants

Briefs Submitted From:

- Lethbridge Community College
- Municipal District of Cyprus
- County of Warner Economic Development Committee